

**Review and Recommendations:  
Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process  
Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel's  
Program Evaluation Committee**

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# **Program Evaluation Committee Report: Summary of Recommendations**

## **Program Evaluation Committee Report:**

### **Summary of Recommendations**

#### **A. NSGO Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Process Proposed Recommendation for the NSGRP's Consideration**

*Issue: What changes need to be made in the structure of the NSGO Final Review of Programs and the manner in which merit funding is allocated?*

Generally, it appears that the NSGO Final Evaluation process is apparently fair and well done. However, there are several issues or perception of issues that need addressing.

- Final Evaluation process lacks transparency -- to make it more transparent ... invite the Sea Grant Program Director who was part of the PAT to participate  
  
(N.B. The Committee voted 4 "In-Favor" and 2 "Against" inviting Sea Grant Directors to participate in the NSGO Final Program Review.)
- The Final Evaluation guidelines lack specificity and do not delineate clear guidance or standards for a clear understanding or definitive implementation;
- The Final Evaluation process needs to codify a rating system similar to the PAT Grading System;
- NSGO Final Evaluation process should be defined so that it considers all elements of a continuous evaluation process;
- Feedback to the general Sea Grant community is needed re: BMPs, accomplishments;
- Program evaluation is an ongoing/continuous process -- other than PATs, these components have received relatively little emphasis and better guidance is needed;
- Final Evaluation presentations made by Program Officers need to be standardized;
- NSGO should continue its efforts to assign staff as program officers on a regional base.

#### **Recommendations:**

The Program Evaluation Committee recommends that the Final Program Evaluation Review Process issues brought to the Committee's attention (above) be addressed by the NSGO in the following prescribed manner:

1. Within 90 days after the NSGRP acts on the Committee's Report, that the NSGO develops and submits to NSGRP a concept paper on how these provisions will be addressed and implemented. At a minimum, the concept paper should delineate the intended review process, proposed timelines, how input will be solicited from the SGA and how the report will be transmitted to the NSGRP.
2. The intent of the Committee is to have this matter fully addressed and timely promulgated prior to initiation of the second cycle of PATs and Final Program Evaluation Review Process.

## **B. Program Assessment Team (PAT) Process**

*Issue: Is the amount of time and effort spent preparing for a PAT visit, and the magnitude of the briefing books excessive? If so, how can they be improved?*

### **Recommendations:**

1. In preparing for the second round of PATs, SG Directors should be encouraged to focus primarily on the program's accomplishments since the previous PAT evaluation. (Research that started earlier, but had impacts during this time, should be included.)
2. Sea Grant Directors should be encouraged to seek brevity in their briefing for the PAT review. The report need not be more than about 25 pages of text (not counting one-pagers and project phylogenies). They should present their accomplishments briefly, in a manner that is readily accessible. Information should be presented systematically to give a picture of the program as a whole. Summary data should be included on the number of pre-proposals, the review process, the number of reviewers, the number of projects funded, and the mean size of grants awarded. Brochures, booklets, newsletters, and other publications should be made available to the PAT during their visit and/or mailed to them separately ahead of the visit, but need not be included in the briefing books.
3. Regarding the effort in preparing for the PAT, such preparation should be integrated into an ongoing self-evaluation process that should be part of the management of the program, and it should not be limited to the months immediately preceding the PAT visit.
4. The length of the scheduled visit should be limited to the time necessary to give a reasonable assessment of the program. In most cases, four days should be adequate. The panel need not visit all sites where work is being done, and they must be given enough time to write their report. Field trips can be a valuable part of the visit, but not all stakeholders and constituencies need to be involved. It is emphasized that the PAT needs time to develop and write its report during the review. This must be part of the agenda planning. As a rule of thumb, a minimum of one-quarter of the working-time spent on-site should be devoted to PAT deliberations and report writing. Efficient logistics are also

critical to the PAT report. The local Sea Grant program should supply adequate computer facilities and staff to assist the PAT in completing the report. This needs to be worked out in advance of the PAT by the NSGO Program Officer and the Sea Grant program Director.

5. There should be some continuity in composition of the PAT from one cycle of reviews to the next. In most cases, the Program Officer from the National Sea Grant Office will continue, and one additional person from the previous PAT should be part of the following team. At the level of the program, the Director can provide information from the previous PAT. A summary of the previous PAT report should be included in the briefing materials, as well as the Director's response to the report. The Director should also discuss what has been done in response to the recommendations from the previous PAT.

### **C. Program Assessment Metrics**

#### ***Issue: Developing Appropriate Program Assessment Metrics***

#### **Recommendations:**

The formulation and implementation of “national metrics” has the potential to shape not only the PA process itself, but a much broader discourse that focuses on how individual programs should be managed, the nature of local program identity and the allocation of merit funds. With that in mind, there is a rather extensive body of both theory and linked application that could be employed in this regard. The practice of “benchmarking,” while originally defined for corporations, now plays an important (albeit at times controversial) role in academia. This formal process is designed to provide strong numerical evaluations and concrete comparisons between actual and “aspirational” peers. The process is also geared towards the development of best management practices that can be disseminated across peer groups. It is clearly beyond the scope of the current committee's purview to attempt to develop a benchmarking process, however this is a potential starting point for a taskforce focused specifically on metrics. Therefore this committee recommends that:

1. The network should form a joint taskforce (NSGO, NRP and SGA) to develop suitable metrics. That taskforce would review the available literature, seek input from those who have conducted benchmarking exercises and propose measures that accurately reflect program output, account for variations in the size and focus of individual programs. These would then have to be cast in a numerical context that can be used in a comparative manner. The implications of this—both from a programmatic as well as strategic vantage—are profound and need to be considered carefully if this approach is adopted. In as much as possible the taskforce should be charged with developing guidelines for non-numerical metrics of program effectiveness. Given the individual nature of the university based management of Sea Grant programs this needs to be approached carefully.

2. The taskforce should be given a sufficient timeframe and budget to accomplish this and consideration given to use of outside experts in this field who can provide input to the process.

**D. Identification of Best Practices/Best Management Practices (Good Methods That Accomplish Sea Grant's Purposes)**

*Issue: Some SG programs have developed very successful methods to accomplish their purposes. During the program assessment (PA) process the Program Assessment Team (PAT) is charged to identify best practices. The PAT is also charged to identify "meritorious institutional program components" and those components that have produced "significant results." Many of these best practices and program components are transferable to other Sea Grant programs.*

**Recommendations:**

1. **Identification** - During a program assessment there shall be a time scheduled and reserved to identify best practices. The responsibility for identification should be shared among the PAT, program personnel, and the Program Officer. These practices shall be highlighted in an identified section of the PAT report.
2. **Disposition** - During the annual review of programs by the NSGO, the staff shall assemble the best practices. Prior to distribution, the NSGO shall invite the director of the program from which a best practice was selected to submit a paragraph describing the practice. The assemblage of best practices shall be distributed annually throughout the Sea Grant Network for information sharing, inquiry, and voluntary adoption.
3. **Insertion into Pat Manual** - Identification and distribution procedures for best practices can be inserted into the PAT Manual, II. Organizing and Managing for Success as the 5th bullet under criteria (page 19 of the PAT Manual dated 3/26/01). Text to be inserted can be derived from the above and added on a separate page of the manual as Criterion 5.
4. **Action to Take Now** - NSGO Staff has assembled a list of best practices as reported by PATs up to 2001. These should be fleshed out (as in Disposition above) and distributed. The collection will be a quick response to what was recommended by the attendees at Sea Grant Week 2001.

## **E. Public Notification of Upcoming Program Assessments**

*Issue: Distribution of public notices of upcoming PAs has been controversial. The Sea Grant Review Panel wants public notification made for two primary reasons: 1. It will increase the credibility of the review in the eyes of the public, the stakeholders, the institution, the NSGO, the SGRP, NOAA, the state and federal governments, and the U.S. Congress - - and 2. Responses of those contacted will identify for the program and PATs the program's strong and weak points and allow for program responses and modifications. Public notification has been optional during the first round of PAs. The Panel has expressed its intent to make public notification mandatory for the second round of assessments.*

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Legality** - The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program shall determine if it is necessary to secure a legal decision regarding the requirement for public notification of program assessments.
- 2. Public Notification Process** - Public notification of an upcoming program assessment will be accomplished by the following process. Sixty or more days prior to the beginning of visitation by a Sea Grant PAT, the program director of the program to be reviewed shall notify those persons associated with the program that the program will be reviewed on DATES by a Program Assessment Team (PAT) appointed by the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program. The notice will invite such persons to submit written comments on any aspect of the program or its work by DATE (3 weeks prior to the PAT visit) to a. NAME, Chairman, Program Assessment Team, % Program Director, STATE Sea Grant Program, ADDRESS, or b. to NAME, STATE Program Officer, National Sea Grant College Program, 1315 East-West Highway, R/SG, Silver Spring, MD 20910.
- 3. Options to Meet The Public Notification Process** - Sixty or more days in advance of the PA, the Program Director shall announce the upcoming PAT visit to all persons associated with the program. Suggested avenues of communication are: email or first class mailings to those on the program's normal e-mail and other notification lists; publication of an article or notice in the program's newsletter and/or magazine; publication of an article or notice in the campus newsletter, newspaper, or magazine which reaches faculty; notification on the program's and institution's web pages.
- 4. Action on Comments Received** - Immediately following the deadline for receipt, the unopened comments shall be sent by express to the PAT Chair. The PAT Chair shall discuss the comments immediately with the Program Director and Program Officer, and with the PAT at an appropriate time. The PAT Chair may discuss the individual comments with the responder prior to, during, or following the PA. At Chairman's

discretion, the comments may be summarized during the PAT's exit meeting with the institution's administrators. The chairman will include a summary of the comments in the PAT report.

## **F. Program Assessment Evaluation Criteria**

*Issue: There are two categories of program evaluation in the PAT Manual which cause confusion for PATs.*

### **Recommendations:**

- 1.** First Category, INTERNAL PROGRAM MANAGEMENT
  - 1a.** Change the wording from "ORGANIZING AND MANAGING FOR SUCCESS" to "ORGANIZING AND MANAGING THE PROGRAM."
  - 1b.** Under the subheading "MANAGING THE PROGRAM AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING," add to the second sentence the words "financial and human" so it reads "Each program must be managed to maximize the recruitment of outside financial and human resources to address Sea Grant problems and issues - - -."
  - 1c.** Under the subheading "MERITORIOUS PROJECT SELECTION," drop the unnecessary word "meritorious." The heading should simply read "PROJECT SELECTION."
  - 1d.** Under the subheading "RECRUITING AND FOCUSING THE BEST TALENT AVAILABLE" change to RECRUITING TALENT. To clarify the intent, change the last sentence so it reads, "The program must have mechanisms in place to identify and attract the best talent available for principal investigators, staff, volunteers, and advisors."
  - 1e.** Under the subheading "MERITORIOUS INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS" change to INSTITUTIONAL COMPONENTS WITHIN THE PROGRAM and modify the descriptive sentence to read, "It is important that research projects, advisory programs, and management, communications, and education activities be appropriately integrated, work to advance their disciplines, and use state of the art methods."
- 2.** Second Category, PRODUCING SIGNIFICANT RESULTS
  - 2a.** Because this category targets the positive impacts a program has on constituents, or the region, and/or the nation, change the heading to PRODUCING SIGNIFICANT RESULTS FOR THE PROGRAM'S CONSTITUENCY AND BEYOND.
  - 2b.** The descriptive text should be reorganized to read, "The program must produce significant results. A basic mission of Sea Grant is to integrate research and outreach to

address and significantly impact the identified needs of its constituency, or the region, and/or the nation.”

**G. Program Assessment Team Grades:**

*Issue: Is it useful to characterize the quality of an entire Sea Grant program by an overall PAT rating such as “excellent” or “very good”? If it is not, what alternative can be recommended?*

**Alternative #1 - A Case for Eliminating Scores Assigned by the PATs**

**Recommendations:**

1. To eliminate grades or scores resulting directly from the PAT visit. Instead let the PAT compile a thorough and meaningful report on the program’s strengths and weaknesses with recommendations for improvement. As is currently the case, the score or ranking for each program used for competitive funding could be determined by the NSGO using a transparent and thoroughly considered procedure in which the PAT report would be a major, but not the only element.

(N.B. The Committee voted 3 “In-Favor” and 3 “Against” this recommendation.)

**Alternative #2 -- Improved Standards for Program Assessment**

**Recommendations:**

1. The system will be more credible and of greater value to national leaders if we had a grading system that differentiated more effectively among various levels of excellence. For this reason, a new grading scale is proposed, tentatively described below, with grades ranging from 0 to 10. This proposal is very tentative, and there is room for discussion of the details of the scale consistent with the basic goal of establishing a grading system that shows real dispersion and motivates all programs to strive to improve.

(N.B. The Committee voted 3 “In-Favor” and 3 “Against” this recommendation. To clarify this vote, the question was asked, if there are to be grades, would you favor a system as presented in **Alternative #2**, the Committee voted 3 “In-Favor” and 3 “Abstain”.)

## **H. The Role of the NSGO Program Officer**

*Issue: One of the contentious issues discussed by the Program Evaluation Committee was the “unknown” that occurs when the NSGO staff meets to give final evaluation grades to the programs (the process is referred to among the programs as the “black box”). Some program directors have concluded that their program officers are not as capable at defending their programs as effectively and vigorously as others. Therefore, their programs may not fare as well as others in the final grading. Further, some program directors are convinced that their program officer is not as familiar with their program as they should be.*

### **Recommendations:**

1. Assignment of Program Officers to Programs -To gain further improvement in relationships between program directors and program officers, the NSGO shall continue its efforts to assign its staff as program officers on a regional basis and for long terms.
2. Duties of Program Officers - To increase interaction between the program officers and their programs, a staff meeting shall be devoted to discussion of the guidelines for the Role of the Program Officer as written in the Copeland, Griswold, Fetterolf 1997 report (next page).
3. Time Spent by Program Officers per Program - The NSGO Director shall consider reassignment of staff duties to allow more than 5% of a Program Officer’s time to each of their 3-4 programs.
4. Importance of Program Officer/Program Relationship - In order to increase the importance of the relationship between a Program Officer and their assigned programs, make the quality of the relationship an important part of the Program Officer’s performance evaluation.

## **I. Effective and Aggressive Long-Range Planning**

*Issue: What changes need to be made in the Strategic Planning requirements of the National Sea Grant College Program Evaluation Process?*

### **Recommendations:**

The Committee recommends adding the following refinements to page 18 of the Program Assessment Manual:

1. Under the current delineated bullet #2, add:

At what stage of the Strategic Plan's development process were stakeholders (especially external stakeholders) provided an opportunity for input? What methodology was used to acquire input?

2. Under the current delineated last bullet, add:

Did the Sea Grant program staff sufficiently demonstrate how the Plan is used as a basis for all aspects of program implementation?

3. Additionally, the Committee recommends that the NSGO provide adequate guidance on what it determines to be necessary core components of an effective Sea Grant Program's Long-Range or Strategic Plan

## **J. The Biennial Implementation Plan**

*Issue: Implementation plans are now required by the NSGO every two years. Confusion exists about the differences between the strategic plan and the implementation plan. Implementation plans are the primary short-range plan for the administration and execution of a Sea Grant program, as well as an important tool for the evaluation of program performance and are derived from a program's strategic plan.*

### **Recommendations:**

1. The Committee recommends that the NSGO retains the implementation plan guidelines to ensure that the integrity of administrative oversight is maintained, but that periodic training and adequate guidance for clarification and compliance with the guidelines be provided.
2. In order to ensure that Implementation Plans are available for PATs, add wording to Section I. Effective and Aggressive Long-Range Planning in the Program Assessment Team Manual to the effect that copies of the program's two most recent Implementation Plans are required as appendices to PAT briefing books.

## K. Developing Guidelines for Self Evaluation

*Issue: Copeland et al., (1997) introduced the idea that all Sea Grant programs are bound to conduct internal "self-evaluations" commensurate with both ongoing process within their respective institutions and unique to their own particular needs. The authors also note, "in no case should the process consume inordinate staff time and resources." Given this guidance, the nature, extent and implementation of self-evaluation are open to a very wide interpretation by individual programs.*

### Recommendations:

Accepting the premise that assessment is an "ongoing process," self-evaluation should be a part of everyday activities. Clearly there needs to be a well defined periodic accounting of this effort. However, if done correctly there are already well-defined mechanisms in place that can be used for this. Indeed, if these internally driven processes are applied, then the external PA process can be viewed as one of many tools to be employed by the local program and will also serve as the formal mechanism for national validation and certification of the locally driven search for excellence. Self-evaluation should not be looked at as a separate part of program management, rather as a core ethic of how programs do business. With this in mind, the committee recommends that individual programs commit to using specific mechanisms already in place to facilitate this important effort. While not excluding other options, programs should determine the best means to employ a process that includes the following elements:

- 1. Implementation Plans:** To be useful, implementation plans should be sufficiently robust and contain milestones with local, regional and national relevance. Programs should track progress against these milestones and note when expectations are met (or not) and when they are exceeded. It is important that changes in program direction or emphasis be noted and justified and new milestones articulated. As with strategic plans, the implementation plan should be seen as a key "living document" that can be a resource for active and adaptive program management.
- 2. Advisory and Stakeholder Boards:** Local program advisory bodies are a key component of all programs. They play an important role in the development of strategic and implementation plans. They should also be enfranchised in an interactive locally based evaluative process. Programs should work with their respective boards to develop specific mechanisms that insure clear lines of communication, discussion of program direction and evaluation of progress in key areas. Where appropriate, consideration should be given to the development of more formalized vehicles (verbal and written) for these bodies to provide comments on progress, direction and accomplishments.
- 3. Annual Reports to NSGO:** The annual report that each program now prepares for the NSGO could be made more specific to include specific mention of progress towards completion of milestones etc. In addition input from advisory bodies may be incorporated

into this document as well. The report will allow NSGO to monitor progress towards objectives and have a more definitive statement of how self-evaluation is being employed by local programs.

#### **L. TATS: Topical Advisory Teams or Topical Assessment Teams?**

*Issue: Is the appellation “Topical Assessment Teams” appropriate, or should it be “Topical Advisory Teams”?*

#### **Recommendation:**

- 1. Name Change** - To better describe the function and purpose of Topical Assessment Teams, change the name from Topical Assessment Team to Topical Advisory Team (same acronym, TAT) and of topical assessments to topical advisory visits (TAVs)

#### **M. Phase II of the Program Assessment Process**

*Issue: As the first cycle of Sea Grant Program Assessments (PA) comes to completion, it is clear this process has had a considerable impact on local programs, the NSGO and NRP. In the great majority of instances, the PA process has been very useful and has provided strong recommendations for the improvement of individual programs—improvements that will ultimately strengthen the Sea Grant Network as a whole. In a very real sense, this first phase has taught each program a great deal about themselves, focused new attention on the NSGO and has laid a foundation for improvements across all sectors of the Sea Grant partnership. This process has challenged the Sea Grant family to embrace a new level of planning, self-evaluation and external review and emphasized the need to fully disseminate and capitalize on the impacts of our collective efforts. Within each of these challenges lie a number of important opportunities for the enhancement of local programs and the growth of the national network. Therefore, it is essential that the PA process enter into a second phase that is focused upon a detailed synthesis of what we have learned, development of state of the art mechanisms to disseminate and market our accomplishments and a concerted effort to optimize the PA process to insure its long-term contribution to the Sea Grant concept.*

## **Recommendations:**

It is the recommendation of this committee that the National Sea Grant Office implement a second phase of the program assessment process (Phase II) that will last 12 months. During this period PAT visits will not occur. Specifically the committee recommends that Phase II include:

1. A detailed synthesis of what we have learned during the past 4-year cycle of PA's,
2. Development of state of the art mechanisms to collate, disseminate and market Sea Grant Network accomplishments to key target audiences
3. A concerted effort to optimize the PA process to insure its long-term contribution to the Sea Grant concept.
4. Phase II should be initiated as soon as possible and should receive sufficient resources to accomplish these tasks and with the expressed intent of yielding tangible products and policies that will be in effect with the initiation of the next PA cycle.
5. The NSGO should lead this effort in close coordination and with the full cooperation of local Sea Grant programs.

(N.B. The Committee voted 4 "In-Favor", 1 "Against", and 1 "Abstain" on this recommendation.)



Report of the Sea  
Grant Review Panel's  
Program Evaluation  
Committee

# **Review and Recommendations: Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process**

## **Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background: Program Evaluation in Sea Grant**

In 1998, the National Sea Grant Office moved from the prospective evaluation of Sea Grant program proposals and their individual projects to a retrospective evaluation of overall program performance and accomplishment based on a four-year cycle. This change was recommended by the Ocean Studies Board of the National Research Council in 1994 and endorsed by the institutions that comprise the Sea Grant Association. The National Sea Grant College Program Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-160) codified this change and charged the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program to evaluate the Sea Grant programs, using the priorities, guidelines, and qualifications established by the Secretary of Commerce.

A goal of program evaluation is to increase the quality and effectiveness of the Sea Grant partnership. To achieve this, program evaluation must be an ongoing, continuous process. Sea Grant adopted several components of program evaluation to achieve a continuous exchange of information between the NSGO and the Sea Grant programs. For example:

- an ongoing dialogue between Sea Grant program directors and NSGO program officers,
- a strategic planning process,
- two-year implementation plans,
- a self-evaluation process,
- annual progress reports,
- evaluation of programs by a Program Assessment Team (PAT) using standard evaluation criteria and benchmarks,
- topical assessment teams (TATs), and
- an NSGO Final Evaluation process and allocation of merit funding

#### **Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee**

The Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel) was established under the National Sea Grant Program Act of 1976. The Panel advises NOAA and the Department of Commerce with respect to the National Sea Grant College Program. One of its explicit duties is to provide advice on and oversight of the performance and the operation of Sea Grant programs.

The Program Evaluation Committee is a permanent standing committee of the Panel charged with the responsibility for the Panel's activities in program evaluation. One of its responsibilities is to conduct periodic reviews of the Sea Grant's evaluation process and to submit to the Panel reports, position papers, and recommendations for improving the evaluation process.

On December 5, 2000, Geraldine Knatz, Chair of the Sea Grant Review Panel sent a letter to the John Toll, the Chair of the Panel's Program Evaluation Committee that stated: "It is now time for the committee to gear up to conduct a review of the first cycle of PAT's and the overall program evaluation process," and issued the committee the charge to develop a set of recommendations for submission to the National Review Panel on the Program Evaluation Process. The report that follows is in fulfillment of this charge.

### **Members of the Program Evaluation Committee**

The members of the Panel's standing Program Evaluation Committee include John Toll, Chair, Carlos Fetterolf, Nathaniel Robinson, and Judith Weis. Geraldine Knatz invited the Sea Grant Association leadership to designate two Sea Grant program directors to participate on the Committee for this important review. Jonathan Kramer, Director of the Maryland Sea Grant College Program, and Robert Malouf, Director of the Oregon Sea Grant College Program, served in this capacity on the Committee. Fritz Schuler was the NSGO staff liaison to the Committee.

### **Recommendations**

All recommendations made in this report reflect a Committee consensus, except where a vote of the Committee is explicitly indicated. The Chair of the Committee also invited Committee members to provide "Dissenting Opinions." One such report was filed and can be found at the end of the report.



# NSGO Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Process

## **A. NSGO Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Process Proposed Recommendation for the NSGRP's Consideration**

**Issue:** *What changes need to be made in the structure of the NSGO Final Review of Programs and the manner in which merit funding is allocated?*

**Background:** The National Sea Grant Office (NSGO), along with one or more members of the Executive Committee of the National Sea Grant Review Panel, is charged with the final review of a Sea Grant Program within one year following the Program Assessment Team (PAT) site visit. The NSGO reviews program information, some of which is not generally available to the PAT and therefore, may represent additional information for the NSGO to use in the final evaluation process. All available information is appropriately weighed.

The merit pool funds are allocated to individual Sea Grant programs on the basis of overall performance as determined by four ratings. Final program ratings reflect a consensus from both the NSGO and outside PAT based on a collective assessment of how well a program has performed in relationship to the evaluation criteria over the last four years. Programs are awarded both minimum and residual allocations. The fixed minimum allocation and the residual share are added together to determine the merit pool allocations for each program. Merit fund allocations are considered augmentations to a program's core funding level.

Questions have been raised about what goes on during the NSGO Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Process annual decision-making meeting. For example, specific questions are: How are final program performance evaluations/assessments made? How are merit allocations made? Is the process fair? Is the process truly meritorious? Given the importance of this process, why isn't it more delineated, more transparent and more widely promulgated?

**Summary of the current NSGO Final Evaluation Process**<sup>1</sup>: One week in February is set aside each year to review the 7-8 Sea Grant programs that have undergone PAT evaluation the previous year. Program Officers prepare for distribution to each NSGO technical staff member the following documents:

- The PAT report along with the institution's response
- The program's strategic plan/implementation plan
- Annual progress reports
- Information on major accomplishments

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<sup>1</sup> Reference sources include Ron Baird's April 22, 1999 memo to the Sea Grant Directors, "*Policy Memorandum on NSGO Final Evaluation and Merit Funding*," which provides a detailed description of the process. A second reference is Section 4 of the NSGO's "*Policy Document on the Implementation and Evaluation Procedures and Omnibus Proposal Submission in the National Sea Grant College Program*."

- Trip and peer review panel reports by the Program Officer
- Topical Assessment Team reports (if any)
- Sea Grant funding information
- Other material deemed to be relevant by the Program Officer
- Four-year project-by-project report on Sea Grant funding
- (Copies of the PAT briefing books and omnibus proposals are available for reading.)

Preparation, Presentation and Discussion: Reading periods are scheduled for NSGO staff to review materials. Each program is scheduled for two or more hours presentation and discussion. The Program Officer's Presentation focuses on:

- Brief Overview of the Program
- Management Structure and Institutional Setting
- Strategic Planning and Outside Advisory Process
- Programmatic Areas
- Major Program Accomplishments
- Best Management Practices identified by the PAT
- Outstanding Issues of Concern

Program Officer's presentation is followed by a general NSGO staff discussion of the program.

Final Evaluation and Merit Allocation Process:

- Following review of all programs, the NSGO Director and staff meet to reach a consensus on the final evaluation of each program and merit allocations.
- Program officers prepare a final report for the NSGO Director's approval
- NSGO Director prepares letter to each University transmitting the report and final evaluation results.

**Discussion:** After hearing presentations from Ron Baird, Fritz Schuler, Jeff Stephan and Jim Murray about the process and what works and what needs improving, Committee Members spent a considerable amount of time discussing this matter. Generally, it appears that the NSGO Final Evaluation process is apparently fair and well done. However, there are several issues or perception of issues that need addressing.

1. The Final Evaluation process lacks transparency and is a particularly confusing part of the overall Program Assessment (PA). Given the fact that the Final Evaluation process

determines merit, its lack of transparency and the resulting confusion can be particularly contentious. One way to make the Final Evaluation more transparent is to invite the Program Director who was part of the PAT to participate in person or via teleconference.

(N.B. The Committee voted 4 "In-Favor" and 2 "Against" inviting Sea Grant Directors to participate in the NSGO Final Program Review.)

2. Concerns were raised regarding a general lack of guidelines (see footnote at bottom of first page) or specificity for this annual Final Evaluation meeting and how well this activity relates to the primary intent of the entire PA process, which is to improve the program.
3. It is the Committee's view, while the two referenced guidelines provide a good general theoretical overview as to how the Final Evaluation process should work, they do not delineate clear guidance or standards for a clear understanding or definitive implementation.
4. There is unanimity in the Committee's position that the Final Evaluation process needs to be codified, a rating system similar to the PAT Grading System needs to be instituted, and the implementing guidelines need greater clarity and specificity.
5. The NSGO Final Evaluation process should be defined so that it considers, assesses and definitively weights the input from all elements of a continuous evaluation process. Additionally, feedback subsequent to PATs should emphasize a program's best management practices and specific outcomes and accomplishments for the Sea Grant community.
6. The Committee believes that one of the fundamental principles of program evaluation is that it is an ongoing/continuous process and not just a once in every four-year event as reflected by PATs. Other components of the program assessment process have received relatively little emphasis and better guidance is needed.
7. Given the fact many facets of the Committee's focus may overlap various aspects of the Review of the NSGO, to avoid any unintentional conflict of recommendations that could be at cross purposes, the Committee asks that drafts of its report be shared with the Committee reviewing the NSGO. The intent of the Committee is that this be done immediately.
8. Based on the presentations given by Ron Baird, Fritz Schuler, Jeff Stephan and Jim Murray, the Committee urges that the Final Evaluation presentations made by Program Officers be standardized and have uniformity in terms of format, items that are covered, and the placement of those items within each presentation. Incorporating more rigors and

structure into the presentation process will significantly decrease Program Officers' variability of content and will increase the quality of the content.

9. In addition to the NSGO promulgating a detailed explanation of the Final Evaluation Process, the Committee suggests a full and thorough discussion of the NSGO Final Evaluation Process be held with Directors at an SGA meeting.
10. Current guidelines (see Copeland, Griswold, Fetterolf 1997 Report, page 11) regarding the role of the NSGO Program Officer need to be reviewed and amended as necessary, to ensure that they delineate clear and decisive expectations for the relationship between NSGO Program Officers and their assigned Sea Grant program with the goal of increasing more of the NSGO Program Officers time learning about/and assisting assigned programs.
11. The NSGO should continue its efforts to assign staff as Program Officers on a regional basis for long terms. Regular staff meetings should include discussion of the guidelines for the role of the Program Officer. Incorporating a Program Officer/Program Relationship component into the Program Officer's overall performance evaluation criteria would be an effective incentive for improving the Program Officer's program knowledge and involvement.

**Recommendations :**

The Program Evaluation Committee recommends that the Final Program Evaluation Review Process issues (above) brought to the Committee's attention be addressed by the NSGO in the following prescribed manner:

1. Within 90 days after the NSGRP acts on the Committee's Report, that the NSGO develops and submits to NSGRP a concept paper on how these provisions will be addressed and implemented. At a minimum, the concept paper should delineate the intended review process, proposed timelines, how input will be solicited from the SGA and how the report will be transmitted to the NSGRP.
2. The intent of the Committee is to have this matter fully addressed and timely promulgated prior to initiation of the second cycle of PATs and Final Program Evaluation Review Process.



# **Program Assessment Team (PAT) Process**

## **B. Program Assessment Team (PAT) Process**

*Issue: Is the amount of time and effort spent preparing for a PAT visit, and the magnitude of the briefing books excessive? If so, how can they be improved?*

- a. There is a feeling that perhaps the time and effort taken by individual programs to prepare for a PAT visit is excessive, and that all this preparation takes a great deal of time away from doing what they are supposed to be doing. There is also a feeling that perhaps the amount of material in the briefing books is increasing and represents unnecessary effort by the programs. There is also a feeling that having to go through this process every four years may be a burden on the programs.
- b. The survey of SG Directors supports the feeling that the time and effort devoted to preparation for a PAT visit is indeed excessive. The effort averaged ~1 FTE (ranging from 0.3 to 1.7 FTE) representing ~ \$77,000 (ranging from \$30,000 - \$175,000) plus about \$9,000 in support costs (ranging from \$2,000 to \$30,000). This amount of money could have supported ~2 additional research grants per program.
- c. The time and effort that were expended for the current series of PATs involved looking back at the program's achievements over differing periods of time, averaging 7.6 years (ranging from 4 to 30 years).
- d. Future PATS will only evaluate achievements over a period of ~4 years. This alone should result in the time and effort in preparation, as well as the magnitude of the briefing books, being reduced considerably.
- e. Much of the weight of some of the briefing books was due to inclusion of brochures and other publications that the program had produced.
- f. About half of the programs have used the materials they compiled in the briefing books for additional purposes.

### **Recommendations:**

1. In preparing for the second round of PATs, SG Directors should be encouraged to focus primarily on the program's accomplishments since the previous PAT evaluation. (Research that started earlier, but had impacts during this time, should be included.)
2. Sea Grant Directors should be encouraged to seek brevity in their briefing for the PAT review. The report need not be more than about 25 pages of text (not counting one-pagers and project phylogenies). They should present their accomplishments briefly, in a manner that is readily accessible. Information should be presented systematically to give a picture

of the program as a whole. Summary data should be included on the number of pre-proposals, the review process, the number of reviewers, the number of projects funded, and the mean size of grants awarded. Brochures, booklets, newsletters, and other publications should be made available to the PAT during their visit and/or mailed to them separately ahead of the visit, but need not be included in the briefing books.

3. Regarding the effort in preparing for the PAT, such preparation should be integrated into an ongoing self-evaluation process that should be part of the management of the program, and it should not be limited to the months immediately preceding the PAT visit.
4. The length of the scheduled visit should be limited to the time necessary to give a reasonable assessment of the program. In most cases, four days should be adequate. The panel need not visit all sites where work is being done, and they must be given enough time to write their report. Field trips can be a valuable part of the visit, but not all stakeholders and constituencies need to be involved. It is emphasized that the PAT needs time to develop and write its report during the review. This must be part of the agenda planning. As a rule of thumb, a minimum of one-quarter of the working-time spent on-site should be devoted to PAT deliberations and report writing. Efficient logistics are also critical to the PAT report. The local Sea Grant program should supply adequate computer facilities and staff to assist the PAT in completing the report. This needs to be worked out in advance of the PAT by the NSGO Program Officer and the Sea Grant program Director.
5. There should be some continuity in composition of the PAT from one cycle of reviews to the next. In most cases, the Program Officer from the National Sea Grant Office will continue, and one additional person from the previous PAT should be part of the following team. At the level of the program, the Director can provide information from the previous PAT. A summary of the previous PAT report should be included in the briefing materials, as well as the Director's response to the report. The Director should also discuss what has been done in response to the recommendations from the previous PAT.



# Metrics

## C. Program Assessment Metrics

### *Issue: Developing Appropriate Program Assessment Metrics*

In its present form, the program assessment (PA) process is a hybrid system that relies chiefly upon a “locally defined” outcomes/impacts assessment. This is then linked to allocation of merit funds at the national level. Because of this it is appealing to think in terms of developing standardized, numerical measures of program accomplishments. With sufficient time it should be possible to develop a set of network-wide metrics for program activity that can be used to provide a “common foundation” for examining the basic aspects of all programs. These data would be easily collated and are conducive to the implementation of large national databases. On the local level they could help individual programs to track progress in specific areas and provide a context for developing new strategies for improvement.

To be fully effective for all programs, metrics should be based on widely agreed upon numerical assessments of specific, highly relevant indicators. It is important to acknowledge that these indicators stress output as a surrogate for impact within each program. While it is inevitable that these will be cast as a way to examine progress—both internally (temporal comparisons) as well as externally (peer comparisons)—numerical metrics must be viewed as only one of several assessment tools available within the larger context of the PA process as a whole.

### **General Principles for the Development of Network-Wide Metrics:**

At the outset, network-wide metrics should focus upon collating information that reasonably represents of what we believe a program should accomplish in set period of time. Hence separate metrics for the research, outreach and education elements of a program should be considered. As efforts to develop these metrics move forward, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that perhaps the most unique and defining aspect of Sea Grant is the integration of program elements. Simple metrics cannot account for management that maximizes linkages and outcomes that cross programmatic boundaries.

**Research:** Measures of the output of research projects are perhaps the simplest to collate. Most programs already track numbers of peer-reviewed publications, attendance by principal investigators at national meetings, seminars given etc. Invention disclosures, patents and industry interactions are also noted. In many cases, programs are able to track how Sea Grant funded programs transition to other (usually larger) funding sources—a strong indicator of a successfully catalyzed effort. If these types of metrics are to be truly effective, they must be implemented within the context of appropriate normalization. Raw data is certainly important but if these are to be used in the context of PA, suitable ways to normalize to program size, number of projects funded, funding base, federal vs. state funds etc. must be developed. For instance, the number of peer reviewed publications for a given period of time is important, however a more useful metric with regard to PA is the number of publications per funded project over the same

interval. As noted earlier, such metrics give relatively little information regarding the impact of the research efforts.

***Outreach:*** Developing suitable metrics of outreach accomplishments will be quite complex. Consideration must be given to at least three elements; communications, extension and efforts of funded researchers to extend their findings to broader audiences. In fact there are probably others to consider as well. With regard to communications programs, data pertaining to the number and type of publications, request rate for print vehicles, complexity and hit rate and number of downloads from web pages are all important. An assessment of the audience reached by each specific vehicle should be reported. Similar to research oriented metrics normalization of these data will also be important as will efforts to account for the rates of change in specific metrics over given intervals. Hence, in the communications arena, metrics should enable a PAT to see if a program is actively marketing and extending its reach to broader or new audiences. Development of metrics related to extension programs should start first with the recognition that many extension professionals already prepare extensive reports through their Land Grant/CES systems. Hence contact rates, numbers of publications, public talks, classes or workshops given are all collated and can easily be incorporated into Sea Grant PA metrics. Impacts of extension efforts on coastal industries may be less conducive to simple metrics but it should be possible to document how efforts have lead to new or improved businesses. In many if not most programs, researchers are actively engaged in outreach directed at constituents outside of their scientific peers. This is a valuable outreach link and if facilitated can be quite important to the overall effectiveness of a Sea Grant program. Assessing how well this is done may include simple listings of presentations of interactions with coastal managers or representatives of business or the general public. Metrics to account for these efforts should be developed and incorporated.

***Education:*** Numerical analysis and reporting of both graduate and undergraduate students supported are tractable, and important metrics of program accomplishment. It will be important to include a more detailed analysis of scientific contributions and when appropriate outreach products of their support. This may include listing not only theses and dissertations, but peer reviewed publications, academic presentations as well as interactions with non-academic constituencies. If possible, programs should track academic and career choices after Sea Grant support has ended. Statistics for K-12 as well as “informal” educational efforts for the general public should be relatively easy to compile. As many programs now target teachers as a prime constituency, it will be useful to note not only numbers of individuals trained, but also to see the numbers of curricula that are shaped by that training and ultimately the number of students who have benefitted from Sea Grant’s efforts.

***Economic and Societal Contributions:*** Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in the search for suitable metrics for economic and societal impacts. Many times these impacts accumulate only over extended durations and are diffuse. This does not diminish their importance—rather it stresses that they must be approached differently. To be effective, economic metrics must be clearly defined and verifiable. Measures of societal impacts will most likely take the form of more extensive narratives that show how program efforts influenced decision making or

contributed to coastal economies. Similarly, an understanding of how Sea Grant activities led to capacity building must recognize that this benefit is often (and rightfully) the product of shared activity and investment by multiple partners in a given locale. In all these cases, normalization to much broader metrics (i.e., federal investment in a state) will be needed.

***An Appropriate Context for Network-wide Metrics:*** Each program is now required to develop detailed strategic plans and to implement them in a well defined manner. Such planning requires that specific interim and final goals or milestones are articulated and reached. Common, network-wide measurements can and should play a central role in this effort provided that they are cast in an appropriate context that acknowledges their utility for national as well as more specific local stakeholder needs. To be effective within the PA process, these milestones must be transparent, sufficiently and realistically robust and easily evaluated by the assessment team. Within the context of PA, this requires that the PAT itself (or specific members) must be well acquainted with the program's planning documents, and be well versed in the theory and practice of outcomes assessments. In addition, adopting this approach places additional responsibilities on the PAT, as evaluations would naturally lead to a more detailed set of recommendations for tailoring these plans.

While it is logical to suggest that milestones incorporate core metrics and that there be consistency in how these more global metrics are reported on the national level, it is important to clearly articulate their role. They should be used as tools for outcomes assessment and as metrics for internal comparison. Philosophically this approach stresses the development of program capability and impact on the local level. Hence numerical output in any given area (research, outreach or education) would be compared against internal planning documents rather than directly to peers. Peer comparisons may well be built into strategic planning documents (i.e., milestones may include raising external funds or achieving a publication/project rate equivalent to those of "aspirational peers") however, accomplishment of these goals should be considered within the context of the evolution of the local program within its local environment. This approach is consistent with the original goals of the PA process.

***Non-Numerical Measures:*** There has been considerable discussion of the fact that Sea Grant's contributions are often difficult to quantify in a strictly numerical context. Efforts that integrate several program elements and occur over several cycles may be particularly difficult to condense into a simple reporting format. Indeed it can be argued that the best efforts are really based in synergies that defy easy quantitation. For instance, the number of peer-reviewed manuscripts generated in any given reporting period gives an indication of output but may not necessarily reflect impact. Hence, a single groundbreaking paper (or patent) may have more real impact in terms of moving an area of science forward, or new product development than others. Along these same lines, a paper or patent issued in a previous cycle may bring unexpected impacts much later. Analogous examples can be constructed with regard to outreach, communications and education efforts. Ongoing efforts utilized by some programs (examples include program phylogenies, and portfolio approaches to organizing data for PAT visits) suggest that the Sea Grant Network is already cognizant of the need to measure these types of impacts.

## **Recommendations:**

The formulation and implementation of “national metrics” has the potential to shape not only the PA process itself, but a much broader discourse that focuses on how individual programs should be managed, the nature of local program identity and the allocation of merit funds. With that in mind, there is a rather extensive body of both theory and linked application that could be employed in this regard. The practice of “benchmarking,” while originally defined for corporations, now plays an important (albeit at times controversial) role in academia. This formal process is designed to provide strong numerical evaluations and concrete comparisons between actual and “aspirational” peers. The process is also geared towards the development of best management practices that can be disseminated across peer groups. It is clearly beyond the scope of the current committee’s purview to attempt to develop a benchmarking process, however this is a potential starting point for a taskforce focused specifically on metrics. Therefore this committee recommends that:

1. The network should form a joint taskforce (NSGO, NRP and SGA) to develop suitable metrics. That taskforce would review the available literature, seek input from those who have conducted benchmarking exercises and propose measures that accurately reflect program output, account for variations in the size and focus of individual programs. These would then have to be cast in a numerical context that can be used in a comparative manner. The implications of this—both from a programmatic as well as strategic vantage— are profound and need to be considered carefully if this approach is adopted. In as much as possible the taskforce should be charged with developing guidelines for non-numerical metrics of program effectiveness. Given the individual nature of the university based management of Sea Grant programs this needs to be approached carefully.
2. The taskforce should be given a sufficient timeframe and budget to accomplish this and consideration given to use of outside experts in this field who can provide input to the process.



# Best Management Practices

## **D. Identification of Best Practices/Best Management Practices** (Good Methods That Accomplish Sea Grant's Purposes)

*Issue: Some SG programs have developed very successful methods to accomplish their purposes. During the program assessment (PA) process the Program Assessment Team (PAT) is charged to identify best practices. The PAT is also charged to identify "meritorious institutional program components" and those components that have produced "significant results." Many of these best practices and program components are transferable to other Sea Grant programs.*

**OBJECTIVE** - The objective is to annually identify best practices and share them throughout the Sea Grant Network. Adoption of best practices by programs could lead to improvements in performance, effectiveness, or efficient use of funds.

**DEFINITION** - A best practice or best management practice may not be "the best" in all situations. It is simply a procedure or project in research, advisory services, communications, education, administration, or management which produces outstanding results in a programs internal operations or outstanding accomplishments toward reaching a program's external goals or objectives. The scope of a best practice can range from local to international. What counts is effectiveness and usefulness.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS RE: BEST PRACTICES**

- 1. Identification** - During a program assessment there shall be a time scheduled and reserved to identify best practices. The responsibility for identification should be shared among the PAT, program personnel, and the Program Officer. These practices shall be highlighted in an identified section of the PAT report.
- 2. Disposition** - During the annual review of programs by the NSGO, the staff shall assemble the best practices. Prior to distribution, the NSGO shall invite the director of the program from which a best practice was selected to submit a paragraph describing the practice. The assemblage of best practices shall be distributed annually throughout the Sea Grant Network for information sharing, inquiry, and voluntary adoption.
- 3. Insertion into PAT Manual** - Identification and distribution procedures for best practices can be inserted into the PAT Manual, II. Organizing and Managing for Success as the 5th bullet under criteria (page 19 of the PAT Manual dated 3/26/01). Text to be inserted can be derived from the above and added on a separate page of the manual as Criterion 5.

4. **Action to Take Now** - NSGO Staff has assembled a list of best practices as reported by PATs up to 2001. These should be fleshed out (as in DISPOSITION above) and distributed. The collection will be a quick response to what was recommended by the attendees at Sea Grant Week 2001.



# **Public Notification of PAT Visits**

## **E. Public Notification of Upcoming Program Assessments**

*Issue: Distribution of public notices of upcoming PAs has been controversial. The Sea Grant Review Panel wants public notification made for two primary reasons: 1. It will increase the credibility of the review in the eyes of the public, the stakeholders, the institution, the NSGO, the SGRP, NOAA, the state and federal governments, and the U.S. Congress - - and 2. Responses of those contacted will identify for the program and PATs the program's strong and weak points and allow for program responses and modifications. Public notification has been optional during the first round of PAs. The Panel has expressed its intent to make public notification mandatory for the second round of assessments.*

**Comments** - A memo (3/9/00) from the NSGO to the Program Directors transmitting the Panel's recommendation for public notification elicited 17 comments against public notification and 15 comments in favor of the process. There are many reasons expressed both pro and con. At SG Wk 2001 the following comments were made: 1. This is a negative element in a positive process; 2. Public notification was not seen to benefit the PAT review; 3. Receipt of comments should be required 3 weeks prior to review to allow for response; 4. The requirement for public notification should be addressed by the legal staff of NOAA to make sure it is within the mandate of the Panel or NSGO.

### **Recommendations re: Public Notification And Commentary**

- 1. Legality** - The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program shall determine if it is necessary to secure a legal decision regarding the requirement for public notification of program assessments.

Comment - Regarding authority of the Panel to require public notification, the Panel's charter under the Department of Commerce states that the Panel "shall advise the Secretary of Commerce with respect to the designation and operation of Sea Grant Colleges and Sea Grant institutes and the operation of Sea Grant programs." "The Panel may exercise such powers as are reasonably necessary in order to carry out its duties."

- 2. Public Notification Process** - Public notification of an upcoming program assessment will be accomplished by the following process. Sixty or more days prior to the beginning of visitation by a Sea Grant PAT, the program director of the program to be reviewed shall notify those persons associated with the program that the program will be reviewed on DATES by a Program Assessment Team (PAT) appointed by the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program. The notice will invite such persons to submit written comments on any aspect of the program or its work by DATE (3 weeks prior to the PAT visit) to a. NAME, Chairman, Program Assessment Team, % Program Director, STATE Sea Grant Program, ADDRESS, or b. to NAME, STATE Program Officer,

National Sea Grant College Program, 1315 East-West Highway, R/SG, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

- 3. Options to Meet The Public Notification Process** - Sixty or more days in advance of the PA, the Program Director shall announce the upcoming PAT visit to all persons associated with the program. Suggested avenues of communication are: email or first class mailings to those on the program's normal e-mail and other notification lists; publication of an article or notice in the program's newsletter and/or magazine; publication of an article or notice in the campus newsletter, newspaper, or magazine which reaches faculty; notification on the program's and institution's web pages.
- 4. Action on Comments Received** - Immediately following the deadline for receipt, the unopened comments shall be sent by express to the PAT Chair. The PAT Chair shall discuss the comments immediately with the Program Director and Program Officer, and with the PAT at an appropriate time. The PAT Chair may discuss the individual comments with the responder prior to, during, or following the PA. At Chairman's discretion, the comments may be summarized during the PAT's exit meeting with the institution's administrators. The chairman will include a summary of the comments in the PAT report.



# PAT Evaluation Criteria and Benchmarks

## F. Program Assessment Evaluation Criteria

*Issue: There are two categories of program evaluation in the PAT Manual which cause confusion for PATs.*

The first category is II. Organizing and Managing for Success. This category contains four areas for evaluation: Managing the Program and Institutional Setting; Meritorious Project Selection; Recruiting and Focusing the Best Talent Available; and Meritorious Institutional Program Components.

The second category is IV. Producing Significant Results.

PATS have difficulty in differentiating the significant results of “Organizing and Managing for Success” from the separate category “Producing Significant Results.”

**Objective** - The objective is to clarify the distinction between the two categories. The first category deals with internal program management. The second category deals with impacting the needs of the program’s constituency, and/or the region, and/or the nation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS RE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT EVALUATION CRITERIA

#### 1. First Category, INTERNAL PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

- 1a. Change the wording from “ORGANIZING AND MANAGING FOR SUCCESS” to “ORGANIZING AND MANAGING THE PROGRAM.”
- 1b. Under the subheading “MANAGING THE PROGRAM AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING,” add to the second sentence the words “financial and human” so it reads “Each program must be managed to maximize the recruitment of outside **financial and human** resources to address Sea Grant problems and issues - - - .”
- 1c. Under the subheading “MERITORIOUS PROJECT SELECTION,” drop the unnecessary word “meritorious.” The heading should simply read “**PROJECT SELECTION**.”
- 1d. Under the subheading “RECRUITING AND FOCUSING THE BEST TALENT AVAILABLE” change to **RECRUITING TALENT**. To clarify the intent, change the last sentence so it reads, “The program must have mechanisms in place to identify and attract the best talent available **for principal investigators, staff, volunteers, and advisors**.”

- 1e. Under the subheading “MERITORIOUS INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS” change to **INSTITUTIONAL COMPONENTS WITHIN THE PROGRAM** and modify the descriptive sentence to read, “It is important that research projects, advisory programs, **and management, communications, and education activities be appropriately integrated, work to advance their disciplines, and use state of the art methods.**”
2. **Second Category, PRODUCING SIGNIFICANT RESULTS**
  - 2a. Because this category targets the positive impacts a program has on constituents, or the region, and/or the nation, change the heading to **PRODUCING SIGNIFICANT RESULTS FOR THE PROGRAM’S CONSTITUENCY AND BEYOND.**
  - 2b. The descriptive text should be reorganized to read, “**The program must produce significant results. A basic mission of Sea Grant is to integrate research and outreach to address and significantly impact the identified needs of its constituency, or the region, and/or the nation.**”

**Comment on Rating Versus Weight.** If the scoring system is dropped, the word “rating” should be changed to “weight.” If a graduated numerical scoring system is adopted or if no change is recommended, the word “rating” stands.



# Program Assessment Team Grades

## G. Program Assessment Team Grades:

*Issue: Is it useful to characterize the quality of an entire Sea Grant program by an overall PAT rating such as “excellent” or “very good”? If it is not, what alternative can be recommended?*

### Alternative #1 - A Case for Eliminating Scores Assigned by the PATs

#### **Recommendation:**

1. To eliminate grades or scores resulting directly from the PAT visit. Instead let the PAT compile a thorough and meaningful report on the program’s strengths and weaknesses with recommendations for improvement. As is currently the case, the score or ranking for each program used for competitive funding could be determined by the NSGO using a transparent and thoroughly considered procedure in which the PAT report would be a major, but not the only element.

(N.B. The Committee voted 3 “In-Favor” and 3 “Against” this recommendation.)

**The Basis for Recommendation:** Let us state clearly, that we agree that Sea Grant needs to be and also to be seen as a national program in which funds are allocated through competitive processes. Some kind of measure of quality is needed to rank one program against another. In short, it is generally agreed that we cannot have program-level competition without having program-level ratings. That is not the issue here. Rather, the issue is the role of the PATs in assigning the ratings.

It is generally accepted and clearly stated in earlier documents (e.g., the 1997 Copeland, Griswold, Fetterolf report) that the assessment process currently in use (the PAT) is intended primarily to improve the individual programs and the network. Rankings for competitive funding purposes are thought of as a necessary but a secondary outcome of program assessment. Since program improvement is the primary goal of the PAT visit, one must ask if distilling the visit’s outcome into a single rating contributes or detracts from achievement of that goal.

Sea Grant programs are complex institutions each of which invariably has elements and activities that are efficient and productive and others that need improvement. In fact, it would probably be best to assume that all elements of all Sea Grant programs could be improved, some just need improvement more than others. Although the PAT now produces a comprehensive written evaluation of each program, those evaluations are seen by relatively few people. It is certainly not clear to the programs and the universities how the report is factored into final merit funding decisions. The universities know only that programs are compared to each other in a competitive process that concludes with closed meetings that occur annually in Silver Spring, MD. In reality

what is now seen and remembered on each campus and throughout the network is the single score that the program receives from its PAT.

By necessity, the programs are evaluated and scored by different teams. When it comes time to assign a final overall rating to a given program, each team now has only four options, Excellent, Very Good, Good, and Needs Improvement. Therefore, although many programs will receive the same score, it is inevitable that some programs are, for example, “more excellent” than others. But, how would the programs or the PATs know that. And, what process or incentive is in place to encourage improvements in a program that receives a rating of “excellent”? We suggest that regardless of the details in the PAT report, programs that receive excellent ratings are less inclined to improve than they would be if they had received no ratings at all.

Of course programs could be assigned numerical scores dividing the range of outcomes on a finer scale (e.g., 1-10 or even 1-100). Creating a finer scale has some advantages over the current process, but it would not change the fundamental reality that the scores for different programs are given by different teams. The process is and must be highly subjective. And so the debate would continue over the meaning of the scores. For example, one might then ask if a program that receives a score of 8 from one team should or should not receive more merit money than one that receives 7 from a very different team, and so on. In any case, the emphasis would still be placed on the score or scores resulting from a PAT visit, rather than on the narrative and the recommendations for improvement.

Further, we suggest that the PATs’ assignment of scores, rather than their focusing entirely on making helpful observation and recommendations, detracts from their potential contribution. For example, we believe that in the final report writing PATs may be hesitant to include written comments if those comments, particularly those that are somewhat critical, might seem to be at variance to the score that they have in mind or that has been determined. In short, we believe that the emphasis on scores and scoring is a distraction for the PATs, and we believe that it detracts from the primary purpose of the PAT visit, i.e., program improvement.

One might ask, how can merit funds be competitively allocated unless the PAT assigns a score? In the first place, even now the PAT score does not translate directly into a program’s competitive position. The score (and the PAT report) are only part of what goes into the NSGO’s determination of merit funding. In the first three rounds of competition the score that 4 of the 22 programs received from the NSGO differed from the score given to them by their PAT. We do not believe that there is anything wrong with that outcome. However, it does raise the question of whether or not our recommendation that scoring by the PAT be eliminated really constitutes much of a change in the current competitive process. Specifically, we do not believe that eliminating the PATs’ scores would give the NSGO any more responsibility or authority or the PAT any less than they already have.

Finally, we would add that we believe that the validity of our recommendation to eliminate scoring by the PATs depends to some extent on the final NSGO competitive process being fair

and transparent. We have no reason to believe that it is currently unfair. On the contrary, we assume that the process is fair, however, it is certainly not transparent. That problem needs to be addressed regardless of whether scores are given by PATs or not.

## **G. Program Assessment Team Grades:**

### **Alternative #2 -- Improved Standards for Program Assessment**

The Committee gained a consensus on many items, but did not agree on the system for reporting assessments. If we cannot find agreement through further discussion, it is suggest to allow the submission of minority reports and leave the resolution to the National Sea Grant Office and the Sea Grant Review Panel, after receiving input from the Sea Grant Directors and others.

We all agree that Sea Grant funding should be increased by an order of magnitude. The chances of winning such an increase in future years will be greatly enhanced if national leaders can be convinced that Sea Grant has an effective program to assess the relative quality of its various programs and to motivate improvements.

The present system of assessing the relative quality of Sea Grant programs, relying to a great extent on Program Assessment Teams (PATs), has been praised by representatives of NOAA and the Office of Management & budget. They were impressed that over a four-year period each Sea Grant program has been assessed by an outside team of experts who have made specific suggestions for improvements, have graded the Program on each of four aspects, and have given an overall grade. It has been understood that the National Sea Grant retained the right to change any grade, but the PAT assessment has been approved in the great majority of cases.

The PATs have imposed a large burden in cost and time for the Sea Grant programs, but most agree that the increased respect for Sea Grant's willingness to assess and to motivate quality has been worth the burden. However, as requests for increased funding lead to detailed reviews, there may be increased skepticism on the value of a program of evaluation in which about 80% of the programs all receive the same top grade. The system will be more credible and of greater value to national leaders if we had a grading system that differentiated more effectively among various levels of excellence.

#### **Recommendation:**

1. The system will be more credible and of greater value to national leaders if we had a grading system that differentiated more effectively among various levels of excellence. For this reason, a new grading scale is proposed, tentatively described below, with grades ranging from 0 to 10. This proposal is very tentative, and there is room for discussion of the details of the scale consistent with the basic goal of establishing a grading system that shows real dispersion and motivates all programs to strive to improve.

(N.B. The Committee voted 3 "In-Favor" and 3 "Against" this recommendation. To clarify this vote, the question was asked, if there are to be grades, would you favor a system as presented in **Alternative #2**, the Committee voted 3 "In-Favor" and 3 "Abstain".)

If it is felt that PATs cannot perform such a grading system, it is propose we look for another group of outside experts who can give meaningful grades for national evaluations.

<u>PRESENT SYSTEM</u>	<u>NEW SYSTEM</u>	
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>10</b>	Extremely Outstanding Performance in All Major Aspects of Program.
	<b>9</b>	Outstanding Achievement in All Major Aspects.
	<b>8</b>	Outstanding Accomplishments in Most Major Aspects and All Aspects of High Quality.
	<b>7</b>	Outstanding Achievements in Most Major Aspects and Adequate Performance in All Major Fields.
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>6</b>	Very Good Accomplishments in Most Major Aspects and No Major Deficiencies.
	<b>5</b>	Very Good Accomplishments in Most Major Aspects and Few Deficiencies.
<b>Good</b>	<b>4</b>	Good Accomplishments in Most Major Fields.
	<b>3</b>	Good Accomplishments Outweigh Deficiencies.
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>2</b>	Satisfactory, But Not Above Average
	<b>1</b>	Some Accomplishment but Has Many Major Deficiencies.
	<b>0</b>	So deficient, Needs Major Change.

# **Continuous Program Evaluation**

## **H. The Role of the NSGO Program Officer**

*Issue: One of the contentious issues discussed by the Program Evaluation Committee was the “unknown” that occurs when the NSGO staff meets to give final evaluation grades to the programs (the process is referred to among the programs as the “black box”). Some program directors have concluded that their program officers are not as capable at defending their programs as effectively and vigorously as others. Therefore, their programs may not fare as well as others in the final grading. Further, some program directors are convinced that their program officer is not as familiar with their program as they should be.*

**Comment** - The Copeland, Griswold, Fetterolf 1997 report on Evaluation of Sea Grant College Programs devoted a full page to the role of the Program Officer, emphasizing the importance of the officer in improving the effectiveness of the program. (See following page. )

### **Recommendations re: the Role of The Program Officer:**

1. Assignment of Program Officers to Programs -To gain further improvement in relationships between program directors and program officers, the NSGO shall continue its efforts to assign its staff as program officers on a regional basis and for long terms.
2. Duties of Program Officers - To increase interaction between the program officers and their programs, a staff meeting shall be devoted to discussion of the guidelines for the Role of the Program Officer as written in the Copeland, Griswold, Fetterolf 1997 report (next page).
3. Time Spent by Program Officers per Program - The NSGO Director shall consider reassignment of staff duties to allow more than 5% of a Program Officer’s time to each of their 3-4 programs.
4. Importance of Program Officer/Program Relationship - In order to increase the importance of the relationship between a Program Officer and their assigned programs, make the quality of the relationship an important part of the Program Officer’s performance evaluation.

*(From: Evaluation of Sea Grant College Programs: Recommendations for the Protocol, Criteria, and Scheduling for Program Evaluation, B.J. Copeland, Bernard Griswold, and Carlos Fetterolf, July 30, 1997, p. 11)*

### **The Role of the Program Officer**

The NSGO has ultimate responsibility for the conduct and effectiveness of the National Sea Grant College Program. A member of the NSGO staff shall be assigned as Program Officer for each program. The Program Officer, the Institutional Program Director and the institution's Program Advisors make up a triumvirate whose purpose is to improve the effectiveness of the program.

The Program Officer has several roles:

- Helping the Institutional Program Director maintain appropriate balance among program elements by re-enforcing Sea Grant's mission and direction with university administration.
- Acting as an agent (broker) for the individual program that he or she represents at NSGO when comparing program accomplishments and relaying the results of program activities to NSGO and NOAA.
- Identifying appropriate program opportunities within NOAA and other federal agencies, and relaying this information to institutional programs.
- Ensuring that peer review processes are maintained at the appropriate level, that faculty and other appropriate candidates have equitable and open access to funding, that results are reported, that local, regional and national issues are being addressed, and that the program maintains a system for adequate fiscal accountability.
- Developing and maintaining processes and systems which facilitate NOAA's oversight of program performance and use of results.
- Reviewing and advising on appropriateness of strategic planning and implementation.
- Organizing special site visit advisors and program assessment teams in concert with the Institutional Program Director
- Providing feedback to the Institutional Program Director on a continuous basis to facilitate appropriate program changes, responses and adjustments.

## **I. Effective and Aggressive Long-Range Planning**

**Issue:** *What changes need to be made in the Strategic Planning requirements of the National Sea Grant College Program Evaluation Process?*

**Background:** The Strategic Planning component comprises 10% of the overall Program Assessment. The foundation of a meaningful and effective program development and evaluation process is a well-developed strategic plan. Strategic Planning is intended to be the principal mechanism for Sea Grant Institutions in setting program directions, goals and objectives. Strategic Planning is an important function that should focus on program direction, expected results and the desired impact to be achieved. The Strategic Plan document should reflect the Sea Grant Program's policy and priorities.

Since there has been no information brought to the Program Evaluation Committee's attention that suggest needed changes, it appears that the current long-range strategic planning guidelines, requirements and 10% overall rating weight are satisfactory and do not need a major revision.

### **Recommendations:**

The Committee recommends adding the following refinements to page 18 of the Program Assessment Manual:

1. Under the current delineated bullet #2, add:

At what stage of the Strategic Plan's development process were stakeholders (especially external stakeholders) provided an opportunity for input? What methodology was use to acquire input?

2. Under the current delineated last bullet, add:

Did the Sea Grant program staff sufficiently demonstrate how the Plan is used as a basis for all aspects of program implementation?

3. Additionally, the Committee recommends that the NSGO provide adequate guidance on what it determines to be necessary core components of an effective Sea Grant Program's Long-Range or Strategic Plan

## **J. The Biennial Implementation Plan**

*Issue: Implementation plans are now required by the NSGO every two years. Confusion exists about the differences between the strategic plan and the implementation plan. Implementation plans are the primary short-range plan for the administration and execution of a Sea Grant program, as well as an important tool for the evaluation of program performance and are derived from a program's strategic plan.*

Background: There seems to be confusion about the differences between the strategic plan and the implementation plan. Specifically, questions have arisen as to when is the implementation plan due? What should it contain? More important, how does it differ from the strategic plan? Also, in light of other reporting requirements, questions have been raised as to whether an implementation plan, as a stand alone, still serves a useful purpose; whether its requirements could be folded into other reporting mechanisms?

### **Recommendations:**

1. The Committee recommends that the NSGO retains the implementation plan guidelines to ensure that the integrity of administrative oversight is maintained, but that periodic training and adequate guidance for clarification and compliance with the guidelines be provided.
2. In order to ensure that Implementation Plans are available for PATs, add wording to Section I. Effective and Aggressive Long-Range Planning in the Program Assessment Team Manual to the effect that copies of the program's two most recent Implementation Plans are required as appendices to PAT briefing books.

## **K. Developing Guidelines for Self Evaluation**

*Issue: Copeland et al., (1997) introduced the idea that all Sea Grant programs are bound to conduct internal "self-evaluations" commensurate with both ongoing process within their respective institutions and unique to their own particular needs. The authors also note, "in no case should the process consume inordinate staff time and resources." Given this guidance, the nature, extent and implementation of self-evaluation are open to a very wide interpretation by individual programs.*

One way to approach this important concept is to focus first on the intent of the guidance and then ask what methods local programs can use to achieve the desired result-both from a local and national perspective. Evaluation and assessment are a means to help programs see what they have accomplished and where they presently stand relative to internal goals and peers. They can also be a very effective way to highlight where changes need to occur and new initiatives need to be pursued. In an ideal sense they are catalysts for program evolution. As such they become the tools employed within the context of a Sea Grant "culture" that is based upon a commitment to improvement. That culture requires that Sea Grant programs are appropriately critical of what they do and seek tangible ways to incorporate evaluation into all aspects of program management. The issue for this committee is to recommend ways to nurture this culture.

**Mandated Self Evaluations:** While it is possible to mandate periodic self-evaluations there may be less proscriptive mechanisms to insure that the process is ongoing and useful-both to the individual programs as well as NSGO. For instance, ongoing discussions focused on definition of appropriate metrics of program accomplishment should yield a set of benchmarks that can be assessed on an annual basis and act as checkpoint for progress towards internal milestones and also contribute to national accountability and reporting efforts. Defining programmatically significant, agreed upon benchmarks that can be incorporated into strategic and implementation plans is key. These efforts should recognize the goals of the process and be cognizant that there is a risk of "trivializing" self-evaluation to the extent that it becomes more of a numerical pursuit rather than an effective catalyst for change

**Institutional/University Evaluations:** Many programs report that they are evaluated within the context of ongoing university based processes-typically on 5-year cycles that may or may not coincide with PAT visits. It is difficult to imagine that the outcomes of these evaluations would not be incorporated into annual reports sent to NSGO as well as the PA process itself. However, in each program, the actual context of these evaluations will have to be articulated and the outcomes translated into a format that is appropriate for the Sea Grant assessment process.

**Training and Recognition:** Specific types of training (evaluation, strategic planning, management) should be made more widely available to the Network through NSGO, or SGA. In addition the NSGO and Network should explore ways to recognize and highlight "management" in the same way that we now honor scientific and outreach accomplishments. Surely there are ways to do this. Best Management Practices are one simple route although we should be

cognizant of the fact that effective management of entire programs may not have single "shining examples" to point to --- rather there may be a series of more subtle contributions that yield a powerful whole.

## **Recommendations:**

### Culture of Local Introspection and Self-Evaluation

Accepting the premise that assessment is an "ongoing process," self-evaluation should be a part of everyday activities. Clearly there needs to be a well defined periodic accounting of this effort. However, if done correctly there are already well-defined mechanisms in place that can be used for this. Indeed, if these internally driven processes are applied, then the external PA process can be viewed as one of many tools to be employed by the local program and will also serve as the formal mechanism for national validation and certification of the locally driven search for excellence. Self-evaluation should not be looked at as a separate part of program management, rather as a core ethic of how programs do business. With this in mind, the committee recommends that individual programs commit to using specific mechanisms already in place to facilitate this important effort. While not excluding other options, programs should determine the best means to employ a process that includes the following elements:

- 1. Implementation Plans:** To be useful, implementation plans should be sufficiently robust and contain milestones with local, regional and national relevance. Programs should track progress against these milestones and note when expectations are met (or not) and when they are exceeded. It is important that changes in program direction or emphasis be noted and justified and new milestones articulated. As with strategic plans, the implementation plan should be seen as a key "living document" that can be a resource for active and adaptive program management.
- 2. Advisory and Stakeholder Boards:** Local program advisory bodies are a key component of all programs. They play an important role in the development of strategic and implementation plans. They should also be enfranchised in an interactive locally based evaluative process. Programs should work with their respective boards to develop specific mechanisms that insure clear lines of communication, discussion of program direction and evaluation of progress in key areas. Where appropriate, consideration should be given to the development of more formalized vehicles (verbal and written) for these bodies to provide comments on progress, direction and accomplishments.
- 3. Annual Reports to NSGO:** The annual report that each program now prepares for the NSGO could be made more specific to include specific mention of progress towards completion of milestones etc. In addition input from advisory bodies may be incorporated into this document as well. The report will allow NSGO to monitor progress towards objectives and have a more definitive statement of how self-evaluation is being employed by local programs.

The process noted here depends in great part upon programs using their own capabilities and connections to important stakeholders. In truth we are recommending simply that programs renew and perhaps formalize these efforts to insure progress and to a lesser extent, accountability.

## **L. TATS: Topical Advisory Teams or Topical Assessment Teams?**

*Issue: Is the appellation “Topical Assessment Teams” appropriate, or should it be “Topical Advisory Teams”?*

**Background:** The origin of TATs arose from the Copeland, Griswold, Fetterolf report on Evaluation of Sea Grant College Programs (July 1997, page 12). The report states “- - - topical assessments may be deemed necessary to advise on specific program elements (e.g. emerging area of attention, outreach implementation or specific research effort, etc.) and/or specific program management mechanisms (e.g. solicitation and review process; information dissemination; interaction with outside agencies, clientele or institutions; etc.).”

**Comment -** A TAT should NOT be viewed as a punitive action. Instead, TATs are a way to bring fresh, expert opinions and suggestions to specific elements within a given program. The TAT process should be available to local programs and the NSGO. A TAT provides the opportunity for a small group of persons, knowledgeable in the topical area, working with the program director, the program officer and invitees, to evaluate an element or an area of a Sea Grant program through an exchange of information and to then offer advice. The team’s responsibility is to render opinions, options, and conclusions in a written report in an effort to improve the topical program element.

A TAT may be recommended by a PAT or the Director of the NSGO, or requested by the local program director in cases where it is clear that outside input could help foster change and program improvement. There must be agreement by the NSGO Director and the local program director to conduct a TAT.

The program evaluation committee agreed that the purpose of TATs is to provide advice, not to assess. Assessment may be part of the process, but the major function is to offer options and advice.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. Name Change** - To better describe the function and purpose of Topical Assessment Teams, change the name from Topical Assessment Team to Topical Advisory Team (same acronym, TAT) and of topical assessments to topical advisory visits (TAVs).



# Phase II of the Program Assessment Process

## **M. Phase II of the Program Assessment Process**

*Issue: As the first cycle of Sea Grant Program Assessments (PA) comes to completion, it is clear this process has had a considerable impact on local programs, the NSGO and NRP. In the great majority of instances, the PA process has been very useful and has provided strong recommendations for the improvement of individual programs—improvements that will ultimately strengthen the Sea Grant Network as a whole. In a very real sense, this first phase has taught each program a great deal about themselves, focused new attention on the NSGO and has laid a foundation for improvements across all sectors of the Sea Grant partnership. This process has challenged the Sea Grant family to embrace a new level of planning, self-evaluation and external review and emphasized the need to fully disseminate and capitalize on the impacts of our collective efforts. Within each of these challenges lie a number of important opportunities for the enhancement of local programs and the growth of the national network. Achieving these goals requires that we move in a deliberate manor to maximize the chances of success. Therefore, it is essential that the PA process enter into a second phase that is focused upon a detailed synthesis of what we have learned, development of state of the art mechanisms to disseminate and market our accomplishments and a concerted effort to optimize the PA process to insure its long-term contribution to the Sea Grant concept.*

The foundation for PA-Phase II has been established by the efforts of individual programs in preparing for their assessments, the willingness of the NSGO to seek guidance for change through external evaluation and the activities of the committee to evaluate the PA process itself. Bringing these efforts together over the next 12 months is a critical step—a step that should be completed before embarking on the next cycle of program evaluations. There is a genuine belief within local Sea Grant programs, that this process must be completed before initiating the next round of program assessments. The consensus is that missing this opportunity will mean that the effort will not be undertaken or will be delayed to the point that it will have no impact on either the next cycle of reviews or perhaps more importantly, on the very pressing imperatives now facing Sea Grant. These unanimous sentiments suggest that there is a significant opportunity to enfranchise all members of the Sea Grant family in a concerted effort to improve. They also suggest that there is a significant risk that moving ahead with the second cycle will be an act that leads to severe polarization at a time when there is much at stake.

### **Developing the Capability for a National Synthesis of Outcomes and Impacts**

Of the many tangible products from Phase I of the PA process, one of the most significant has been the compilation of detailed program outcomes and impacts assembled by each local program. Produced in both written as well as in a variety of electronic databases, this information has become a vital resource on the local level. It is also of fundamental value to the entire Sea Grant community and NSGO. The compilation of this data presents a real opportunity for NSGO to take a leadership role and build upon what is arguably one of their most important

functions— and indeed obligation— as the locus of national coordination. A period of 12 months before initiation of the next PA cycle is essential to this effort.

Developing the mechanisms to collate and synthesize the information developed in Phase I of the PA process requires a concerted effort that should include:

- Focused, intensive strategic and implementation planning to build this capability at NSGO
- Analysis of electronic (web-based) resources and development of sufficient platforms and database architecture
- Coordination with local programs to insure that numerical metrics, outcomes, impacts and creative, highly effective management practices are recognized.

Assuming a leadership role in this area will reap very large benefits to NSGO and the Network as a whole. This activity will serve as a model for how to collate, synthesize and distribute the intellectual products of a dispersed network of programs. It will show how efforts that are highly relevant on a local level are thematically linked and collectively have national impacts.

To achieve this goal, the NSGO and local programs must work in concert. Phase I of the PA process has provided the foundation for this effort. At this point, mechanisms have yet to be fully discussed and development—based upon the experience of local programs that have done this on smaller scales— is several months away. If we do not embark upon this effort and complete it before the next round of PA's is initiated, constraints of time and resources will present significant barriers to implementation. It can be argued that missing this opportunity will in fact diminish what the PA process accomplishes by limiting synthesis and dissemination of outcomes to the local programs, NSGO and the NRP.

If done well, this effort can have much broader long-term impact beyond an effort every 4-years to collate PA outcomes. Well-developed, systematic mechanisms will serve as a conduit for ongoing input from the Network to NSGO. In the best sense, this can become an up-to-date resource for numerous stakeholders within the Sea Grant family and far beyond.

### **Extending the Impact of Program Assessments to Wider Audiences**

Synthesis of information will be valuable to Sea Grant only if we are able to successfully use it to inform key stakeholders. This extends from end users of information in numerous coastal constituencies to those who decide on Sea Grant's annual appropriation. Simply put, we must show how we have true national impacts and are contributing to stewardship of coastal resources. Clearly this is a core mission for Sea Grant. However, opportunities and imperatives before the Sea Grant family now demand that we become far more adept in this arena than we have ever

been before. The products of the PA process are a substantial resource that will enable Sea Grant to:

- Market the Sea Grant concept to NOAA, OMB and Federal Legislature
- Highlight Sea Grant's contributions to coastal management, industry and the general public
- Increase Sea Grant's visibility to key stakeholders
- Present a strong, effective case for increased funding and reauthorization

The stakes are very high. We are currently seeking a substantial increase in Sea Grant's budget and a new reauthorization. If we attempt to achieve these goals in anything less than a systematic, network-wide manner we may well fall short. The goal of a 12-month period of database development and synthesis must be to put our collective knowledge to work meet this challenge.

### **Optimizing the PA Process**

Over the past year, the nature of the PA process itself has been the subject of ongoing debate and formal evaluation. There continues to be widespread agreement that PA process is of central importance to the health and development of the Sea Grant concept. With that in mind, considerable attention has been focused on several aspects of the process itself and there is genuine support for finding ways to improve upon several facets of the assessment including:

- Reducing the cost and burden that a 4-year cycle of evaluation places on local programs
- Defining metrics used to evaluate program success
- Evaluating how ratings are used by the PA teams
- Defining the role of the NSGO in program assessment and ongoing evaluation processes
- Bringing transparency to the annual merit allocation process

It is important to acknowledge that a possible outcome of an effort to optimize the PA process may be misinterpreted within NOAA as an attempt to delay program evaluation. However, there are logical and indeed viable strategies to overcome this criticism. The ongoing discourse regarding the PA process has shed light on how local programs and NSGO do business. It has challenged us to re-affirm the Sea Grant model and indeed to improve the underlying partnership that is the foundation of the Network. Forging ahead with the next round of assessments without having this discourse has consequences that will propagate through the Network for the duration of the next cycle. Simply put, these are large issues that demand attention. A 12-month period of reflection and consensus building may well incur some political cost but these will be a small price to pay for the long-term improvements that can come from this honest effort.

**Recommendations:**

It is the recommendation of this committee that the National Sea Grant Office implement a second phase of the program assessment process (Phase II) that will last 12 months. During this period PAT visits will not occur. Specifically the committee recommends that Phase II include:

1. A detailed synthesis of what we have learned during the past 4-year cycle of PA's,
2. Development of state of the art mechanisms to collate, disseminate and market Sea Grant Network accomplishments to key target audiences
3. A concerted effort to optimize the PA process to insure its long-term contribution to the Sea Grant concept.
4. Phase II should be initiated as soon as possible and should receive sufficient resources to accomplish these tasks and with the expressed intent of yielding tangible products and policies that will be in effect with the initiation of the next PA cycle.
5. The NSGO should lead this effort in close coordination and with the full cooperation of local Sea Grant programs.

(N.B. The Committee voted 4 "In-Favor", 1 "Against", and 1 "Abstain" on this recommendation.)



# Dissenting Opinion

**MEMORANDUM**  
to the  
**National Sea Grant Review Panel**

Report of the Program Evaluation Committee: A Dissenting Opinion

by

**Nathaniel E. Robinson**  
National Sea Grant Review Panel Member  
Member, Program Evaluation Committee

September 2001

Report of the Program Evaluation Committee  
A Dissenting Opinion

There is one provision and one recommendation contained in the Program Evaluation Committee's Report about which I have concerns to the extent that I am motivated to submit a different point of view than that shared by the majority.

1. Involving Sea Grant Program Directors in the Final Evaluation Process: The specific provision in question is included in the, "NSGO Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Process," page 2, the Discussion section, paragraph #1, which reads,

The Final Evaluation process lacks transparency and is a particularly confusing part of the overall Program Assessment (PA). Given the fact that the Final Evaluation process determines merit, its lack of transparency and the resulting confusion can be particularly contentious. *One way to make the Final Evaluation more transparent is to invite the Sea Grant Program Director who was part of the PAT, to participate in person or via teleconference.* {Italic emphasis added.}

I support the need for the NSGO to objectify and make visible to the fullest extent feasible, materials and information on which a program's final evaluation is based and merit allocation is awarded. My concern however, goes to the last sentence (in italic) in the above-referenced paragraph. I do not support the involvement of Sea Grant Program Directors (SGDs) in the NSGO Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Process.

I believe such participation would be inappropriate; it would potentially set up a case for perceived if not an actual conflict of interest, and in my judgment, involving SGDS in the Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Meeting, would enhance neither the transparency nor the confidence of this process. Fact is, it could have the opposite, unintended result; it could have a chilling effect!

There is one point of view that argues, since SGDS already participate in PATs without any insurmountable problem surfacing or resulting, why shouldn't their participation continue into Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Process? That's a good question and my response is, the PAT is a data-gathering process.

Full and appropriate participation by SGDS in all data-gathering phases/stages prior to the Final Program Review and Merit Fund Allocation Process should be encouraged and supported. However, once all the data are in and this phase has concluded, the final decision-making process for programs should rest with the NSGRP and the NSGO.

It is my opinion that the last sentence in the referenced provision should be stricken, i.e. ~~One way to make the Final Evaluation more transparent is to invite the Sea Grant Program Director who was part of the PAT, to participate in person or via teleconference~~ Therefore, I recommend accordingly.

2. A 12-Month Recommended Delay in Commencing the Second PAT Cycle: I support the need to address the issues identified in the briefing paper. I concur with the belief that addressing these issues will improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the National Sea Grant Program.

However, I do not share the majority opinion that a definitive and compelling case has been made for a 12-month delay. The majority opinion suggests or implies that the one and only way to address needs and achieve objectives delineated in the background briefing paper is to delay the commencement of PAT phase or Cycle II for a year. Proponents of the delay argue that a 12-month interruption will enable Sea Grant to:

- α Market the Sea Grant concept to NOAA, OMB and Federal Legislature
- α Highlight Sea Grant's contribution to coastal management, industry and the general public
- α Increase Sea Grant's visibility to key stakeholders
- α Present a strong, effect case for increased funding for reauthorization.

Additionally, it is argued that a 12-month delay will allow for "finding ways to improve" upon several facets of the assessment including:

- α Reducing the cost and burden that a 4-year cycle of evaluation places on local programs
- α Defining metrics used to evaluate the program success
- α Evaluating how ratings are used by the PA teams
- α Defining the role of the NSGO in program assessment and ongoing evaluation processes
- α Bringing transparency to the annual merit allocation process.

The concept paper on delaying Phase 2 of the PAT process for twelve months is excellently written! I am impressed with the arguments presented but not convinced! The concept paper does not discuss alternatives for achieving the aforementioned objectives and neither does it discuss disadvantages of the 12-month delay option. Most importantly, the paper does not make a compelling case as to why a year's interruption is the one and only viable *game in town!* I support the need to achieve the delineated objectives but do not agree that the one and only way to achieve success is to delay the PAT process for 12 months!

An important question that the paper does not discuss or address is, what is so magical or superior about 12 months -- why not 6, 9, 15, 18, 24, etc.? As already indicated, there are no alternatives presented. Given the importance, magnitude and possible impact of the recommendation for a 12-month delay, alternatives and a discussion of the pros and cons would have been helpful.

Considering the absence of definitive and compelling information as to why a delay in starting up Phase 2 of the PAT process is imperative *and* why a delay of 12 months is the one and only viable option, I offer the following observations and recommendations:

Observations – The two program components that most need to be addressed prior to commencing Cycle 2 of the PATs are the metrics and grading systems. Based on the Committee's discussions, I believe there already exists and are readily available sufficient data and information sets, paradigms (models) and evaluation metrics to make meaningful improvements in both assessment systems prior to the commencement of PAT Cycle 2.

Recommendations –

1. That Cycle 2 of the PATs not be delayed but should proceed as scheduled.
2. That the NSGRP ask the NSGO Director to recommend improvements in the program evaluation metric and program assessment grading components to the NSGRP, prior to initiation of the Cycle 2 of the PATs and, that input be sought from the SGA.

3. That the NSGRP ask the NSGO Director to immediately appoint a task force comprised of representatives of the sea grant community, to study and recommend short and long term solutions for the other referenced issues. The task force should also address long-range improvements in the program metric and grading systems.



# Appendices



## **Appendix A**

### **Charge to the Program Evaluation Committee**

**Geraldine Knatz, Chair  
Sea Grant Review Panel**

**December 5, 2000**



# *The Port of Long Beach*

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December 5, 2000

Dr. John S. Toll  
Chancellor Emeritus  
University of Maryland  
Physics Building, Room 4124  
College Park, Maryland 20742-4111

SUBJECT: CHARGE TO THE PROGRAM EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Dear John:

Thank you for agreeing to stay on as Chair of the Program Evaluation Committee. It is now time for the committee to gear up to conduct a review of the first cycle of PAT's and the overall program evaluation process. In that regard, the committee has the following charge:

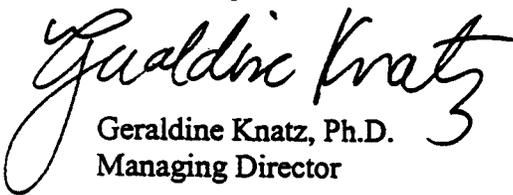
1. Develop a set of recommendations for submission to the National Review Panel on the Program Evaluation Process. These recommendations will be scheduled for discussion and adoption at the November 8-9, 2001 Panel Meeting. (Note: You will recall that we are shifting the panel meetings to spring and fall in 2001. The November meeting will be in place of our January 2002 meeting.) In order to fully vet the recommendations among the Sea Grant Community, it will be necessary for the draft committee report to be prepared and submitted to the Panel Executive Committee no later than August 31, 2001.
2. Coordinate with two members of the Sea Grant Association who will be assigned by their leadership to participate in those activities. They have not been named yet but will be shortly. I will notify you as soon as I get the names.
3. The Committee is charged to look at all aspects of the Program Evaluation Process, including the PATs and the annual review and final scoring of programs conducted by the National office. In that regard, we will focus one half of our training day at the January meeting on a special training session on metrics. In addition, there should be time during the meeting for panel members to provide feedback for the panel's consideration.



4. The Committee should pursue its charge via conference calls as much as possible. The Committee should plan on meeting during Sea Grant week. In addition, the agenda for Sea Grant week will likely include a session discussing the PAT process that will be important for members of the committee to attend. It may be appropriate to schedule additional meetings if necessary
5. The Committee should coordinate with Jeff Stephan who has been the panel representative on the annual review of programs conducted each spring by the National Office.
6. Fritz Schuler will be the National office staff person who will be the committee's liaison. Coordinate with Fritz on any documentation necessary for the committee including his previous annual summaries of the evaluation process. As you suggested, spending a half day with him in the National Office to get refreshed on those previous reports may be worthwhile.
7. I have asked Nat Robinson to fill a vacancy on the committee created by Elaine Knight. As you know, he is working on a suggestion on getting feedback from outside members on the PAT teams. The current committee consists of Carlos Fetteroff, Judy Weiss and the two Sea Grant Association members. Feel free to request any other panel members who you would like to join the committee.

Please let me know if you need any other assistance to carry out this effort. I know that under your leadership the Committee will be able to undertake and successfully complete this very important work effort. Once the committee report is submitted to the Executive Committee, we will seek feedback from the Sea Grant Community. The Panel will then act on any recommendations at the January meeting.

Yours truly,



Geraldine Knatz, Ph.D.  
Managing Director

cc: Carlos Fetteroff  
Judy Weiss  
Nat Robinson  
Ronald Baird  
Fritz Schuler  
Peter Bell  
Jeff Stephan  
Frank Kudrna  
Rick DeVoe



## Appendix B

### Documents Used by the Program Evaluation Committee

1. ***Charge to the Program Evaluation Committee***, Geraldine Knatz, Chair, Sea Grant Review Panel, December 5, 2000.
2. ***Policy Document on the Implementation of Program Evaluation Procedures and Omnibus Proposal Submission in the National Sea Grant College Program***, National Sea Grant Office, September 2000 (w/ transmittal memo, Ronald Baird, "FY2001Omnibus Proposals and Beyond" September 8, 2000).
3. ***National Sea Grant College Program Performance Evaluation (1998): A Report to the Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere***, Ronald Baird, National Sea Grant Office, July 1999 (w/ transmittal memo, Ronald Baird, "Annual Performance Evaluation Report 1998", July 29, 1999).
4. ***National Sea Grant College Program Performance Evaluation (1999): A Report to the Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere***, Ronald Baird, National Sea Grant Office, July 2000 (w/ transmittal memo, Ronald Baird, "Annual Performance Evaluation Report 1999", August 4, 2000).
5. ***Policy Memorandum on NSGO Final Evaluation and Merit Funding***, Ronald Baird, April 22, 1999.
6. ***Program Assessment Team Manual***, National Sea Grant College Program, Revised August 15, 2000.
7. ***Guidelines for PAT Chairpersons***, Geraldine Knatz, Sea Grant Review Panel, Revised, January 9, 2001.
8. ***1998, 1999, and 2000 Program Assessment Teams, Summary of Evaluation Marks***, National Sea Grant Office, January 2001.
9. **PAT Members 1998, 1999, and 2000**
10. **Evaluation of Sea Grant College Programs: Recommendations for the Protocol, Criteria, and Scheduling for Program Evaluation**, B.J. Copeland, Bernard Griswold, and Carlos Fetterolf, July 30, 1997 (w/transmittal letter, John Toll, Chair, Sea Grant Review Panel, 1997.)



## Appendix C

### Program Evaluation Committee Chronology of Activities

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>
December 5, 2000	<b>Charge to the Program Evaluation Committee;</b> Letter to John Toll from Geraldine Knatz
February 2, 2001	<b>Memo from John Toll to Committee;</b> distribution of Sea Grant documents related to Program Evaluation (See Appendix A)
March 1, 2001	<b>1st Committee Conference Call:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of the Committee's charge</li><li>• Brief overview of relevant documents</li><li>• Preliminary identification of 16 program evaluation issues</li><li>• Assignment of Committee member responsibilities</li><li>• Structuring the Sea Grant Week forum on Program Evaluation Committee Schedule</li></ul>
March 20, 2001	<b>Sea Grant Week - Committee Issue Statements --</b> distributed and posted on Sea Grant Week web site.
March 26, 2001	<b>Committee Breakfast Meeting</b> at Sea Grant Week - preparation for the afternoon session
March 26, 2001	<b>Sea Grant Week Breakout Session -- "Program Evaluation Process - An Assessment"</b> - participants were updated on the status of the Committee's assessment of the Sea Grant program evaluation process. Initial comments from attendees were invited on issues that should be addressed by the committee during the course of their work. Written comments on program evaluation were encouraged by May 1, 2001.
April 10, 2001	<b>Distribution of report from the Program Evaluation Committee's Sea Grant Week session</b> (with the excellent help of Mary Lou Reb, Wisconsin Sea Grant); posted on the Sea Grant Week web site
June 14, 2001	<b>Survey of Sea Grant Directors</b> regarding the Program Assessment process completed (Jon Kramer)

June 15, 2001	<b>Survey of past PAT members</b> including Sea Grant Directors who have been on PATs completed (Nat Robinson)
June 16, 2001	<b>2nd Committee Conference Call:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of SGD and PAT members surveys</li> <li>• Discussion of Baird letter to Committee</li> <li>• Discussion of issue statements</li> </ul>
July 12-13, 2001	<b>Program Evaluation Committee meeting</b> at NOAA Headquarters in Silver Spring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination of PAT Briefing Books, PAT Agendas, and PAT Reports</li> <li>• NSGO Final Evaluation and Merit Funding</li> <li>• PAT Process</li> <li>• Metrics</li> <li>• BMPS</li> <li>• Public Notification</li> <li>• Evaluation Criteria</li> <li>• Continuous Program Evaluation</li> <li>• Phase II of Program Assessment</li> </ul>
August 10, 2001	<b>Revised Issue Report Writeups Distributed</b>
August 20, 2001	<b>3rd Committee Conference Call</b> Continuation of Issue Discussions
September 4, 2001	<b>4th Committee Conference Call</b> Continuation of Issue Discussions
September 17, 2001	<b>Revised Issue Report Writeups Distributed</b>
September 20, 2001	<b>5th Committee Conference Call</b> Continuation of Issue Discussions Decision on Recommendations - Consensus or Vote of the Panel Discussion of Report Structure
~ October 5, 2001	<b>Committee Final Report</b> to Sea Grant Review Panel Executive Committee